



Press Release

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(Kure Beach, North Carolina) -- In a ceremony today, Coastal America designated the North Carolina Aquariums as the United States' 18th Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center. This prestigious national designation was presented to the Aquarium by P. Lynn Scarlett, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Benjamin Grumbles, Assistant Administrator for Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Other dignitaries in attendance included Rep. Mike McIntyre and N.C. Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources Bill Ross.

Ms. Scarlett welcomed the North Carolina Aquariums to the Learning Center network, noting that: "The Administration is firmly committed to ocean and coastal issues. The Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center network connects with more than 20 million people each year, educating them about the function and value of coastal resources."

The Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center network was established in 1996 by Coastal America, an interagency federal partnership that works to protect, preserve and restore the nation's coastal ecosystems. The Learning Centers are selected to serve as regional educational centers that work closely with the federal partners to educate the public about the value of coastal resources.

Mr. Grumbles said, "The Coastal America federal partners are eager to work with the North Carolina Aquariums to educate the public about the importance of protecting our country's coastal ecosystems."

The North Carolina Aquariums worked closely with Coastal America to receive the official designation. "We're delighted to be included in this forward-thinking network," said David Griffin, director of the North Carolina Aquariums Division. "This designation will make it possible for us to deliver our conservation message to far more people, far more effectively, than ever before."

The federal partnership provides the North Carolina Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center a wide variety of resources, including research vessel time, expert speakers, educational publications, lesson plans, exhibit materials, films and more.

The North Carolina Aquariums is the first Coastal America Learning Center with multiple facilities. Two of the facilities, located at Fort Fisher and Roanoke Island, received the designation today. The third facility, located at Pine Knoll Shores, will receive the designation when it reopens after renovations are completed, in spring 2006.

To learn more about Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers and Coastal America, call 202-401-9928 or visit www.coastalamerica.gov.

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About the organizations:

North Carolina Aquariums — The North Carolina Aquariums were established in 1976 to promote an awareness, understanding, appreciation and conservation of the diverse natural and cultural resources associated with North Carolina's ocean, estuaries, rivers, streams and other aquatic environments. The North Carolina Aquariums are a division of the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The Aquariums are accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. Last year, the North Carolina Aquariums educated more than one million visitors.

Coastal America — Coastal America is a partnership among federal, state and local governments and private alliances to address environmental problems along our nation's coasts. The federal partners are: departments of Agriculture, Air Force, Army, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Navy, State and Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Executive Office of the President.